

# The REFORMED JOURNAL

Volume 3 — No. 7

A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion

July, 1953

## Theology by the Week

*I*t has been said I suppose times without number that Calvinism is a *balanced* system. With the thought ordinarily intended by this statement, I have no objection. Yet I am afraid that something subtle has taken place. I fear that men have deduced from this oft repeated statement the idea that "balance" is a theological principle. I fear that the thought is abroad that the finest theological system is one in which all doctrines are balanced the one over against the other, and that the finest theologian is the one able best to perform this balancing act.

To keep our thinking straight it should be said occasionally that Calvinism is an unbalanced system. After asserting that Calvinism nicely balances the sovereignty of God with human responsibility, *et cetera*, and that this constitutes its glory, it ought to be asserted that Calvinism posits a great unbalance between God and man, between God's grace and man's works, *et cetera*, and that this unbalance also constitutes its glory.

Furthermore, for the sake of keeping our thinking straight, it ought to be roundly declared that the system which is Calvinism is *not* the product of devotion to the theological principle of balance. The principle of balance was not adopted as a theological blueprint for the building of the Calvinistic system. We do not, for example, believe in human responsibility so as to have a counter-balance to the truth of God's sovereignty. For the principle of balance is neither a theological nor a biblical principle. Devotion to this prin-

ciple in our theological and religious thinking is devotion rendered to an idol.

How often we protect our system of theology and criticize another, because it does not maintain a proper balance, because it too much emphasizes this or that truth. How frequently the argument is heard, for example, that the theology of Rev. Hoeksema is too logical, too rational, that it too much emphasizes election and reprobation. As might have been expected, these arguments have left him wholly unimpressed. If the doctrine of election and reprobation is true, how can it be stressed too much? Can truth be too much stressed? Is it possible to be too logical, too rational? When we level these objections to his theology, do we really mean that he ought also to be a little illogical and a little irrational so that his logic and rationality will be balanced? It is small wonder that he has been unimpressed by such naive theological criti-

cisms. He knows very well that it is as impossible to be too logical, or too rational, or too emphatic about election and reprobation, as it is impossible to be too good. No good theologian would be moved by such un-theological talk. Yet a large bulk of the criticisms sent his way have been of this caliber. Hoeksema knows full well that such criticisms do not criticize his theology, and I suspect that he knows that those who dispatch such criticisms thereby give a token indicating that they are moving toward theological bankruptcy.

How often have not our people also been warned, and our ministers and professors too, that they must not be too intellectual. Those possessed of intellect and not yet overly scared by the warnings not to be too intellectual will perhaps ask what it means to be "too intellectual." Such a question is indeed a good question, one which no one is able to answer. It is as impossible to

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## Theology by the Week — Continued

say what it means to be too intellectual as it is impossible to say what it means to be too good. The very question, What does it mean to be too intellectual? is an illegitimate question. Yet it is natural for the question to arise when warnings are issued against being too intellectual. The very emergence of the question, therefore, indicates that the warning itself is illegitimate. Yet how often being truly pious and truly God-fearing is posited as a counter-balance against being too intellectual. How often being pious and being intellectual are set over against each other as two good things which will only be, and only remain good, if properly balanced.

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MUCH is being written nowadays in our press about common grace and the antithesis. Some of it is pretty absolutistic stuff — the kind of thing that disturbs and troubles the mind of the Church. Seeing the dangers of absolutism, some arise to smooth the mind of the Church. And the soothing solution is again "the principle of balance." The old idol is again raised, and the people aroused to render it new devotion. The solution propounds that we must keep our balance. We must not stress common grace too much, and we must not stress the antithesis too much. Nor must we stress either too little. We must distribute our emphasis equally on the two truths. Here a little, and there a little, but neither here nor there too much. The balance is the thing. And thus the illusion is created that a good theology is constituted by proper balance of all its parts, and the best theologian the man who can best perform this balance-act.

All this is illusory, and perhaps even entertaining, but it has nothing to do with theology nor the theologian. When the principle of balance becomes a theological principle, the theologian is then reduced to a juggler. The theological trick is to hold too long neither to the doctrine of common grace nor to the antithesis, but to hold now the one and then the other, with equal attention to each. This solution to the problem of holding both to the doctrine of common grace and to the doctrine of the antithesis has of course a great advantage, especially if one is afraid of being too intellectual, for if the theologian is a good theologian and can perform the

juggling trick fast enough neither the performer nor the viewer is ever sure at any given moment what he is looking at, for the performer with real skill will make both truths appear to be one big blur.

This principle of theological balance will also help the preacher who does not like to answer specific questions about what he really means. The principle of theological balance will give him "theology by the week." He does not have to know how common grace and the antithesis are inter-related. He need only emphasize common grace this Sunday, and the antithesis with equal emphasis next Sunday. He need then not be unduly troubled by questions as to what he really meant this Sunday, nor by the same kind of questions his hearers might ask next Sunday. Nor need he be troubled by the questions that may arise in his own mind or in the mind of his hearers as to how the two truths fit together. For a theological principle of balance requires only an equal distribution of emphasis and the real truth of the whole matter comes out not this Sunday nor next Sunday, but sometime on Wednesday — when the pews are empty and the preacher is busy with other things.

And if some puzzled listener still insists on knowing how an absolute antithesis between believer and unbeliever and a doctrine of common grace can be reconciled, he can always be told to exercise a simple faith and not be too intellectual. Or the preacher of the theological principle of balance can as a last recourse beat a retreat into the asylum of mystery and tell the questioner that it is a mystery much too deep for us.

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**I**N a former article (May, 1953) I attempted to show that Point I of the Three Points of 1924 have something very positive to teach on the whole question of whether believers and unbelievers have something in common and on the question of the antithesis. Point I teaches that believers and unbelievers do have something in common, namely common grace. It further illustrates and demonstrates the truth of this by alluding to the general or common offer of salvation as taught in the Canons of Dordt. By so doing it relates the question of common possession by believer and unbeliever to the subject



VOLUME III

No. 7

JULY, 1953

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Rev. Harry R. Boer, Dr. James Daane,  
Rev. George Stob, Dr. Henry Stob,  
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Published each month by the  
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Subscription price: \$2.00 per year

Entered as Second Class Matter at the Post  
office at Grand Rapids, Mich.

Address all subscriptions and communica-  
tions to:

THE REFORMED JOURNAL  
255 Jefferson Avenue, S. E.  
Grand Rapids 3, Mich.

of the antithesis. For the gospel which must be generally offered to all is also related to the antithesis, for the gospel is the gospel of *reconciliation*. It proclaims that God is reconciled to the world in the Cross, and that the world is invited and obliged to be reconciled to God through that same Cross. The fact that this gospel of reconciliation must be proclaimed as a general offering to all, indicates three very elementary things about the antithesis:

1. The antithesis is in the first instance the attitude of God toward sinful man, and thus something between God and man, and not in the first instance between man and man. To insure God reveals his attitude in history and in and through man (the seed of the woman) and ultimately in the Man Christ Jesus. Nevertheless the antithetical attitude is in the first instance God's attitude. God is the one who has posited the enmity (Gen. 3:15). And God is the one who has slain the enemy through the Cross (Eph. 2:16). Therefore, God's antithetical attitude is redemptive and is characterized by redemptive love. Consequently, the antithesis must be defined in reference to God's attitude toward man as revealed in the Cross. When the antithesis is defined apart from this reference it loses its distinctively Christian character. For the antithesis is at bottom

a matter of God's attitude, a question of how God feels toward the world.

2. The Christian's attitude toward the world must be as God's attitude toward the world. The attitude of the church toward the world, of the Christian toward the non-Christian, the love of the Christian for his unregenerate neighbor, must be patterned after God's attitude toward the world as revealed in the Cross. The Church must be for the world as God is for the world in the Cross. The Church must love the world as God loved the world in the Cross. The Church's attitude toward the world must be as well-meant and as well-meaning as God's general offer of salvation to all men, defined as offer and demand. Toward the world the Church must have the "mind of Christ."

3. The antithesis is not something static, timeless, and unchangeable — as it necessarily becomes when it is de-

fined in terms of the absolute difference between regeneracy and unregeneracy. The doctrine of the antithesis must be defined in terms of God's act of reconciliation in the Cross, for at the Cross the antithesis underwent change, for there God was reconciled to the world and the enmity was slain. This changeability of the antithesis-situation is the presupposition of all gospel preaching. If it were unchangeable, no man would be saved and our preaching would be vain. What is the world, can become Church; what is antithetical, can be reconciled. The Church believes in this possibility because she believes in the Cross and its gospel. It is this understanding of the antithesis that determines the Church's attitude toward the world.

Thus Point I of 1924 indicates some very positive things about the inter-relation between common grace and the

antithesis. It does not leave the Church with two unrelated doctrines and inform her that she should stress each a little, or each a little more, but neither too much. It does not abandon the Church to a theology of balance, nor bequeath her a theology of equal distribution of emphasis, which in practise becomes a "theology by the week." It teaches us that the question of commonality between believers and unbelievers, and the question of the antithesis cannot be defined apart from God's attitude revealed in the Cross, and expressed in the doctrine of the general offer of the gospel.

A theology which teaches less may present a lovely system of balances and counter-balances, adorned with interesting and expert theological jugglers, but the whole affair will be sub-Christian.

JAMES DAANE

# Synodical Agenda

By GEORGE STOB

**A**GENDA" is a Latin word which may be freely translated: "things that are to be done." When used in connection with the meetings of an official assembly, it stands for "program of work." The *Synodical Agenda* is, therefore, an official report of matters that must be dealt with in Synod.

The *Agenda* has two parts. The first part contains a number of Reports — from Boards, Standing Committees, and specially appointed Study Committees. The second part contains a number of Overtures — requests or proposals with reference to the life, work, organization of the church — sent in by Classes, and in some instances by Consistories. These are often brief, and sometimes quite innocent looking. But they need careful and thorough scrutiny, for there is no limit to the possibilities of either fruitful or erroneous thinking and action that may be initiated by overtures.

\* \* \*

**C**ONSIDER, for example, the *Agenda* for the Synod of 1953. It came off the press and was distributed the first week in May — a mere month before the convening of Synod. It's too bad our Societies are not still in ses-

sion then. The *Agenda* would provide some interesting matter for discussion and debate — and this would be helpful not only for enlightenment a large segment of the Church's mind, but also for preparing the ministerial and elder delegates for the part they must take in the deliberations of Synod. But the societies are adjourned, and the membership of the Church, to say nothing of *Synodical* delegates, have little opportunity for discussion of these important matters, or even for adequate personal study. The time of gardening, golfing, motoring, and the hard grind of Spring work is here. The *Agenda* couldn't come out at a worse time.

The very late appearance of the *Agenda* makes impossible, too, fruitful comment and exchange of opinion in our journals. We have virtually no opportunity, therefore, for the forming of seasoned community judgment on matters crucial to the life of the Church. Most of the *Synodical* delegates must stand hopelessly alone before the problems to which they must address themselves. Coming almost *de novo* to matters that are thrust upon them, they have to think and decide out of a near vacuum — and are likely the more easily only to be confused by comments or counter-comments heard over coffee cups or in *Synodical* debate.

It is true that for those who faithfully live and think into the life of the Church and her problems, there will be some conditioning for deliberation and decision. But this is not enough. There must be a good deal more conditioning in the community mind for the specific matters with which the Church must deal in a given period. Decisions arrived at in Synod ought to be the crystallization of a common mind formed by community and discussion over a somewhat sufficient period of time. Otherwise they become decisions imposed by majority vote on a Church unable to understand them and without a readied mind to concur in them.

We can never hope to achieve an ideal situation on this score. Life is urgent and moves fast, and often we are forced to make decisions out of shallow and insufficient thought. In consequence, the Church has to live in large part by trial and error — hoping that much of what is decided will be right, conscientiously ready to study and decide again whatever has been wrong.

We cannot, therefore, hope to achieve the ideal in the matter of preparation for *Synodical* deliberation. But we ought to do all we can to provide opportunity for more study and discussion —

## Synodical Agenda — Continued

in the whole community life of the Church — of the major problems and challenges which are to be dealt with at Synod. And we can do *something*. The "something" will not be everything we might desire. But before God we are bound to do whatever we can to improve our address to this calling that God lays upon us.

What can we do? I make bold to venture a few suggestions.

\* \* \*

1. Synod ought to determine that — allowing only for rare and urgent exceptions — *no report of any Study Committee shall be acted upon by Synod unless it has been in the hands of the Church for at least nine months — from September to June.*

It may be objected that this would put three years between the assignment of the study and Synodical action on it — since Study Committees are allowed two years' time. What of it? If the problem is weighty enough to occupy a group of intelligent men for two years, it is weighty enough to allow one year for study and appraisal by the Church.

Really, however, a Study Committee doesn't need and shouldn't be given two years. The grant of two years is (barring very exceptional cases) least of all conducive to most effective work. A Study Committee doesn't need more than a year's time, and will turn out a better report if its study is concentrated and well organized.

The two-year arrangement is a waste of time and energy. Those of us who have served on Study Committees know how it goes. There are one- or two-day meetings, at rather widely spaced intervals. Little progress is made at such meetings, and when the Committee meets again much of the context of the previous study is lost, and a good deal of time is consumed in trying to get re-oriented. This is no good.

Better, an arrangement something like this.

(a) As soon as Synod is adjourned, the Stated Clerk sends to each member of the Study Committee a copy of the Synodical mandate and the official material or references relating to it, with the request (or instruction) to make a *preliminary analysis* of the problem in

preparation for the first meeting of the Committee. (Give the Stated Clerk an office and a Secretary — he needs them anyhow!)

(b) Early in September the Study Committee convenes for a brief (one- or two-day) meeting, to discuss and if possible agree on a *working analysis* of the problem. In the light of that, particular phases may be assigned for study to the various members of the Committee. Each member is to prepare a rough brief of the matter assigned to him, and send it to the other members of the Committee.

(c) Then, in late November or early December, the Committee meets *for a whole week* of uninterrupted study (Stay with friends or relatives — skip the hotels! The Church is a communion of saints. How about an entertaining Church?) By this time the problem should be quite on the way to clear definition, and a solution or solutions be in the process of emerging. The Secretary of the Committee will forward a digest of study to this point to each member of the Committee for his further study — perhaps, again, special phases of study should be assigned. In the interim, each member works over the material, and prepares himself in writing for the next meeting.

(d) In February the Committee meets again — for a whole week. At the end of it the Committee ought to see the outlines of its Report. There may be the beginnings of a rough draft of a Report.

(e) One more meeting — for a week or less — to polish off the report, or to decide on majority and minority reports. As soon as the Report(s) are finished, they will be sent to the Stated Clerk, who will have them printed in pamphlet form, with perforations for inclusion in a loose-leaf note-book, and sent out to all Consistories. The type thus set up may be used for reprinting the report in the Acts.

This will mean a bit of hard and concentrated study by each Committee member. But that's what he's appointed for, and it will do him worlds of good. As for time taken out — both minister and congregation ought to be willing to make that little contribution to the general welfare of the Church. If laymen are members of the Committee, un-

able to take a whole week out, some adjustments will have to be made; and a competent laymen will manage to in and render his particular service even if unable to attend every meeting.

2. The Church, and in particular the writers in our periodicals, should be delivered of the notion that when a Committee is charged with the study of a problem, no one else may speak or write about it. There should be no suspicion at any time of the life or thought of the Church, least of all in addressing current problems. Speak and write — with common sense and discretion, of course — as opportunity allows and the Spirit moves! This will help, not hinder the work of the Study Committee and enable it the more to think along with the community mind and less abstractly. And the community mind will grow into the problem and its resolution.

3. Let all materials intended for the *Agenda* be set in type, printed, and distributed as soon as ready. Let it be printed in leaflet or pamphlet form, uniform size, with perforations for inclusion in loose-leaf note-book. Aim with the March 15 deadline! Let reports be printed as they come in, and let those who are late be shamed, those who are early, and let them be penalized by the reflection that they will serve the Church. And away with that neatly-bound, compact, thorough, handy, but almost totally useless *Agenda*! Feed the Church piecemeal with reports and overtures as they come. Don't throw the whole book for a single poorly-digesting gulp, in the time of Spring fever, when men are itching for golf, tending the lawn and garden, and caught up in the work of new planting and growing. And those leaflet or pamphlet studies will be easy to handle and be kept from becoming fugitive in the loose-leaf note-book.

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Well, this is no charm designed to correct all the weaknesses to which men — even saints — are heir. But it is something. Maybe somebody else sees something better. At any rate, it is something we need — for better, more deliberative Synods, and for more intelligent and conscientious Synod judgments and decisions.

# THE CATHEDRAL

By HARRY R. BOER

WE who stand in the spiritual tradition of John Calvin think of him as a reformer and a theologian, as a writer of the *Institutes* and of the *Commentaries*. Only infrequently do we think of him as a preacher, and hardly at all as one who addressed the world of his day from the pulpit of a massive cathedral. That Calvin during the space of thirty years preached his eloquent sermons in the impressive setting of marble and stone structured in Gothic beauty is worthy of note.

On a hill on which old Geneva was built stands the Cathedral of St. Peter. It overlooks the now much extended city and beautiful Lake Leman sparkling amid the foothills of the Alps. This cathedral I recently visited. It is an experience that does not leave a conscious son of the Reformation untouched to walk on the very stones on which Calvin walked, to worship in the church in which he proclaimed the Gospel, to look down the long nave as down the ages and to stand small under its vaulting arches. Calvin, I discovered, had been given a speaking platform worthy of his message and personality. His timeless witness was spoken in the symbolic setting of enduring stone hewn into the form of a heaven pointing cross.

\* \* \*

ST. Peter's in Geneva is neither in size nor architecturally one of the great churches of Christendom. It does not have the rich magnificence of St. Peter's in Rome, nor the massiveness of Notre Dame in Paris, nor the delicacy and unity of that most perfect and superb of all churches, the cathedral in Milan. In fact, St. Peter's in Geneva is something of a hybrid. Its two towers are of square Romanic style, its sanctuary is Gothic, and the present facade which was added some centuries after the completion of the cathedral proper is Greco-Romanic, much like the pillared front of Calvin College. But for all that, it is an impressive structure and one that lends solidity and respect to the religious tradition which has helped to perpetuate.

When Calvin preached in St. Peter's it was already rich with three hundred fifty years of history. He who ascended the pulpit and they who worshipped in

the pew were already then conscious of the weight of a tradition and of a cloud of witnesses who had gone on before. And these witnesses expected loyalty to the sacrifice that they had made and to the tradition they had launched. For into the building of an old cathedral went more than a pledge of annual contributions and an eight-hour day by hired workers. Read how a cathedral rose from the ground in Twelfth Century Normandy:

*Whoever saw or heard tell of such things? Powerful and wealthy men of noble birth and proud and beautiful women, bowing their necks beneath the yoke of the wagons that bore their stones, and wood, and wine, and wheat, and lime, and oil, everything that was needed to build the church and keep the workers. A thousand people were to be seen, men and women, all drawing one cart, so heavy was the burden laid upon them, and among the multitude, struggling forward in deep emotion, deep silence reigned. At the head of the long procession, the mighty minstrels sounded their copper trumpets, and bright hues of holy banners waved in the wind.*

Building the cathedral was the work of everyone in the community. It was an act of faith, a religious exercise. The cathedral became a faith symbolized in sculptured stone.

In the building of a modern church a different pattern is followed. Whoever, in the days when cathedrals were built, saw or heard tell of such things? A congregational meeting is held, it is voted by a substantial majority to build a new church. A building committee is appointed. Bids are asked, a contract is let. A bond issue is floated. A union keeps plumbing for the plumbers, masonry for the masons. On a given day the building is "turned over" to the congregation. There is prayer when the corner stone is laid, prayer when the building is dedicated. For the rest, a contractor who sustains no relationship of any kind to the religious community for whom he is building is in charge of constructing God's house.

It probably cannot be done otherwise. The Church of Jesus Christ is divided into many denominations and

most of these are spread over vast areas. Seldom does a large entire community build a church. The economic resources of the divided Christians do not permit the building of vast and spacious cathedrals. The Roman Catholic Church does not suffer from this disadvantage and this is evident in its houses of worship. They are cathedral-like if not cathedrals in fact. And the division of labor in our highly complex economy does not permit men and women, boys and girls, to put common shoulders to the wheel and make a religious exercise out of a great common effort to interpret in stone the faith that lives in the soul.

I am aware that not all the marble of the great cathedrals represents the unmixed steadfastness of their hewers' devotion to God. Was not the income of Tetzel's sale of indulgences used to finance the building of Rome's mighty St. Peter's?

*When in the chest the money rings  
The soul from Purgatory springs.*  
But cathedrals can be built and doubtless have been built without recourse to such abuse. The fact remains that a simple and religiously unified society found within itself the idealism and the resourcefulness to unite brawn and brain and heart in the construction of massive immutable sermons in stone that breathed comfort and repose to harried souls throughout the changing generations. And the fact also remains that we do not so build.

*We dig harbors and channels, writes a historian, we build factories; our forebears thought nothing more urgent than to erect upon earth a counterpart of heaven. Strange economists, these, who poured all the resources of their time into works which were to enrich nobody!*

CALVIN still lived in this tradition. Who shall say how much the dedication of his life, how much the massiveness of his theology owe to the cathedral tradition, to the strengthening buttresses and mighty arches and heavy pillars. Great spirits are helped by great environments.

Dutch American Calvinists have quite left this tradition. We build houses of worship to last some generations and expect that then our great-grand-chil-

## The Cathedral — Continued

dren will erect new ones. But we will not be in those new buildings. Our spirits will be absent, lost in the ruins of the old. And because we will not be there those who lived before us will not be there. Our posterity will stand alone, much as we now so largely stand alone. They will be conscious of a physical relationship to those who gave them birth but somehow strangely distant from their spirit and ideals, just as we now stand strangely distant from the spirit and ideals that lie at the fountainhead of our tradition.

Have we not become quite poor? Theology is the queen of the sciences in the Reformed tradition, but we have not produced a new thought, have not found a new vision in half a century. But there has been endless casuistry about the movies and divorce. Apparently isolated from all that went before or came after stands concern with the large problem of Common Grace in 1924. Why was no more heard about if for twenty-five years and more? Was it really theological and religious concern that lifted the problem to prominence a quarter-century ago?

I think that all this is the way it is because we have not the inner strength to build *cathedrals*. Like the rest of America, we have the *money* to build them, but not the inner strength. We have money to build a million dollar science building. We have more millions for a commons building and dormitories and other such soulless structures. But there is on Calvin's campus no cathedral, no small effort at one in the form of a solid, spacious, worship-inviting chapel. This the often emptily boastful descendants of the preacher of St. Peter's in Geneva do not have at the center of their denominational life.

Now I do not mean to say that we cannot build a cathedral-like chapel on our school grounds. Of course we can. We could probably still wedge it in between the present dormitory and the Library. Enough propaganda and the thing will stand there ere long. Did not Rockefeller set forth enough millions to build Riverside Church? We can do the same on a smaller scale, for we are a determined people when we get going. But it would not, I fear, be a *cathedral*.

A cathedral, to me, represents a profound human appreciation for history in its religious significance and devel-

opment. It says that God is the Lord of History. Therefore it cuts the never-aging rock out of the eternal hills and fashions it into an enduring structure, a testimony to man's witnessing, consecrated, royal service to the God of time, past and present and future. That is a cathedral. That is a true cathedral. In such a cathedral one never stands alone. One stands in the consciousness of communion with and indebtedness to the past, and of a stewardship to discharge in the present and transmit to the future. It is this sense of history, the sense that builds cathedrals of stone or stately mansions of the soul, that we have lost in the Christian Reformed Communion.

Of thirty-eight American-born members in last year's graduating class at Calvin Seminary three or four had a passing degree of proficiency in Dutch. The affinity of the others for the great tradition out of which they came was limited to a vague historical appreciation. It was not their fault. Their religious and cultural community had lost it for them. Theologically we have wholly lost the daring that in Holland fifty years ago established new patterns of thought, enriched old ones, and produced works that delighted and strengthened a virile people. Books were sold and read because of their inherent worth. We have lost a great tradition. Lost the spirit of inquiry, and the spirit of discussion and mutual confidence so essential to it. Lost it so much that it is not always safe to be true to the theological tradition that gave us birth. Such a religious and cultural community cannot build a cathedral. Is so utterly unable to build a cathedral that if it built one it would not be one. For a true cathedral is an embodiment of history, the monumentalization of a faith that unites the generations. And it is the historical sense, the indebtedness which it creates and the obligation which it establishes, that we have lost. The very fact that every annual synod is composed nearly one hundred percent of men who were not members of the previous synod shows the want of appreciation for the need of historical continuity. Go to Calvin's library and see how its shelves are stocked, how unreal the touch with the contemporary theological situation, how inadequate its storing up of the thought of the past, and you will know that we are not, cannot be, a cathedral-building people.

Can we again become one? Assuredly we can. Did not Israel become temple-building people after the long captivity? So we can again become cathedral-building community. But first we will have to unlearn and leave our idolatries as Israel had to unlearn and leave its idolatries. The chilling and killing touch of a dead traditionalism, satisfaction with what great men said in living context to their day many years ago, living on them but not extending them, the substitution of legalism for the safeguards of the liber wherewith Christ has made us free — these, all these, must go, and unfettered men must be free to preach the unfettered Word to a world that needs unfettering from a bondage that only free men can effect. This only people who live in the tradition of Calvin can do — people who live in the cathedral tradition.

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HE significance of Calvin is not so much that he said new things, but that he spoke old truths in a new way in living context with his day. He absorbed into himself all that was best in the long history out of which he had come and he knew how to use it in making the Scriptures speak their message for his generation. The Bible is timeless, theologies are its exposition in the concrete situation in which the Church finds itself. We must get away from the notion that has so long dominated our thinking that theology or dogmatics is simply a compendium of propositions. It must serve the Church in its existing need. Christ saves us alone from the world but also in the world as sin expresses itself in a given era of the world's history. Kuyper spoke against the easy-going Christ-denying Modernism of his time. Calvin took issue with the traditionalism of Rome and with its denial of the liberty that Christ has given us. Against these evils he made the Bible speak, passionately demanded the right to know what the Bible says and for more than thirty years he wrote its meaning in study and preached its message in the cathedral, sending throughout Europe a wave of energy-unleashing life that permanently affected Western civilization.

I knew it from reading the *Institutes* and now after visiting the cathedral I know more than ever that Calvin could not possibly have spent his days on the movie question; in defending the position that card-playing is sin but

the Church must not do anything about it because everybody is doing it; in holding that an illegally divorced person can never, never be a member of the Christian Church so long as the partner is living and then, after forty years, undertake to see if there is scriptural ground for such a position. We are called to more serious and responsible theological stewardship. Our preoccupation with trivialities and with improperly formulated problems has cost us the riches of our tradition and given nothing in its place. "And while thy servant was busy here and there, the man escaped."

Before we can again become a cathedral-building people, before we can produce preachers worthy of the cathedral pulpit, it will be necessary first to return to the cathedral tradition. We must learn again to see the abiding in all flux, and to see the meaning of that which abides for that which changes. Then we shall learn not to make a problem like the movie question the focal point of denominational concern for twenty-five years only to see the coming of television make the manner in which the whole question was tackled seem rather obsolete and even absurd. Nor shall we find time to ask or to enter seriously into the merits of the question "Should Ladies Knit on Sunday?"

We have spent too much of our time on these things while theological issues languished. Let us leave

them to individual judgment and conscience, but let us be busy building good sense of judgment and good conscience in the mind of the Church. If the Church will attend to this her true knitting, the Sunday knitting of the ladies will take care of itself. Then theology and preaching and teaching and pastoral care will again begin to occupy the place in the Church which they were intended to occupy. For the cathedral tradition does not know the petty and the small concern. It concerns itself with the little ones in the flock and with their little problems, but it does so with the same depth and genuineness with which the master sculptors of the cathedrals called on their highest skill to fashion the capital of an obscure pillar or the unnoticed cornice on a wall.

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**T**HE Ninth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, is not a cathedral. It is not even a cathedral-like structure. But it stands in the Cathedral tradition. With the skill and resources they had at their disposal Van Raalte and the colonists built a goodly church. The Pillar Church we call it. This symbol of religious idealism and devout aspiration the Ninth Street congregation, as also the community at large, has always appreciated and they have preserved it by

the good care that flows from concern to retain a noble tradition. The wooden structure has not been allowed to fall into disrepair until the sloping of it was necessary. It has been refurbished on the inside and kept weather-proof on the outside. The foundation has been renewed and a spacious basement constructed. The Old is still there, but it has been preserved, guarded and extended to serve succeeding generations. This is the Cathedral tradition. Preserve, Guard, Extend — only so can a tradition be perpetuated.

Can the Reformed tradition among us still be preserved, guarded and extended — above all extended — for only so can a tradition be preserved? Clearly the days of the Prophets are gone and we are fallen upon the evil days of Scribes and Lawyers with their precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Let us stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, that we may find rest for our souls. Let us remember the free spirit, the prophetic voice, the fearless witness of the man who preached in St. Peter's. Mayhap the Master Builder will yet make of our Communion a spacious Cathedral in which we may serve him. For His promise remains: I will raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.

# The Case for Foreign Languages

By W. HARRY JELLEMA

**T**HE practical answer of the typical student to the question whether he shall study foreign languages in school or college, and if so, which, may be summed up as follows:

1. If I am directly required, or am indirectly forced, to study some foreign language, I shall select

a. That which requires least effort in the learning; or

b. That which appears to have some economic value.

2. But if none is required and I am not forced to choose between it and something more difficult, I shall not study a foreign language.

It is our custom to credit the student, when he so answers, with a good deal

of obstinacy but with no argument. Therein we are unfair to the student. Actually he has a case, and given his argument, his conclusion follows with enviable consistency.

Suppose we attempt to state his case.

The typical student approaches the question of foreign language study with the following presuppositions:

I. Behind and in all language is, of course, thinking. Now thinking is of two kinds:

A. There is thinking which is *immediately practical* or vocational, which is concerned with the solving of some pressing problem of conduct or behavior, best typified by the thinking of the business man; and,

B. There is *theoretical thinking*, thinking which is not done for the sake of some immediately practical objective.

In this first presupposition the student is right enough. Language is important because it expresses thinking; and his classification of thinking would, as a general statement, be accepted.

There is another assumption he makes:

II. With regard to the second kind of thinking, the non-practical or theoretical, it is important to distinguish two kinds:

A. Non-practical thinking which deals with and is controlled by reality, leading therefore to objective truth; and,

## The Case for Foreign Languages — Continued

B. All other non-practical thinking, which is sheer speculation, day-dreaming, projection of wishes, guessing, expression of psychological quirks, subjective opinion.

In this second presupposition the student is right again. Within theoretical thinking there is no more important distinction than that between thinking which, controlled by reality, leads to truth, and thinking which yields only subjective opinion or fancy.

He makes a third assumption:

III. The only kind of non-practical thinking which is controlled by reality and yields truth is that which we do in the sciences; all other non-practical thinking is mere subjective fancy, etc. In other words, all literature, with the exception of scientific, is the expression of subjective fancy, and no more.

\* \* \*

We have conceded the student his first two assumptions. If he is right in the third also, then he is right in concluding that the only respectable arguments for studying a foreign language in college are these three:

1. Study of a foreign language is necessary in a given case for some specific practical purpose of mine; e.g., trade with Brazil, or the teaching of French in high school.

2. It is necessary in a given case of intended specialization in some field of theoretical thinking of the scientific type in order to obtain information available only in that language.

3. It will introduce me to the interesting psychological quirks and subjective fancies and folklore of other peoples; i.e., it will introduce me to what is called their (non-scientific) "literature"; thus it affords me opportunity to broaden myself by comparing my own fancies with theirs; a comparison which should in turn lead to a substantiation of my view that no thinking is trustworthy which is not scientific.

And then he is also right in dealing with each of the arguments in some such way as this:

1. As for the immediately practical objective,

a. All ancient languages are dead, and except for the prospective high school teacher of them, so at the present

time are French and German and Italian.

b. If with a view to business I take a modern language, which one I select depends on the commercial opportunities and prevailing economic weather. Spanish looks good now; next year it may be Russian; the year after it may be Balinese.

c. If college authorities will permit me to substitute something easier or more directly practical, why should I study a foreign language? If some other language is needed in my business I can always hire someone who knows it and is good for nothing else.

2. With reference to the argument that foreign language is necessary as a tool for the scientist,

a. It is necessary as a tool only for one who expects to go in for research; for the kind of man who takes a Ph. D.

b. Even for a "major" in any one of the sciences, an undergraduate can get by without being able to use a foreign language.

3. Since as typical student I do not need it for practical life, and since I do not intend to be a specialist, there is only one argument I need seriously consider. This is what I suppose is the essence of all the argument from the side of "cultural advantage," "liberal education," and the like. But,

a. To teach me the subjectivity of non-practical thinking outside of the sciences, I don't need an introduction to other peoples' quirks and folklore; I am already convinced.

b. What is "making the world smaller" is science and business; and the way to live as citizens of our smaller world is to forget all the *mores* that keep us apart and to live not by literature but by science, not by dreams but by hard thinking. Economic forces dictate history; of these forces and of their control the real interpreters are the men of business and of science. Whatever their countries, they speak the same language; they understand each other in any language.

c. As for leisure time, I do enjoy reading. But no one has enough leisure even to keep up with Book of the Month clubs, let alone reading all that has been written in English in the stuffy past; why take on a foreign literature besides?

d. Of course there are always people who happen to have an interest in language study. They usually become language professors. The interest is harmless enough, but as typical student, I don't happen to possess it.

e. And if there is anything at all to this argument that we should at least know something of other peoples' customs and ideas, a much more efficient and advanced way to acquire such knowledge is through travel and especially by movies, by what in high school we called visual education.

\* \* \*

The student has a case. Given his presuppositions, I think I should argue much as does he. Admiring his consistency in jumping over his fence rather than attempting to straddle it, I should in practice answer the question of foreign language study just as does he: No foreign language unless the school inscrutably demands it, or unless I happen to see business or vocational value in it.

The student is wrong. But one cannot take issue with his conclusion as long as one presupposes with him that all non-scientific literature is merely psychological phosphorescence and folklore.

The student's error lies not in his deductions but in the falsity of his third presupposition. It is literature as a whole, including scientific literature but certainly not dogmatically excluding the rest, which expresses the controlled theoretical thinking, the thinking controlled by reality, that has been and is being done.

And so, too, it is literature as a whole, not only scientific literature, which is the instrument for teaching the student or anybody else how to think properly: how to think properly even about such a question as whether non-scientific literature arrives at truth. If we take literature in less than this inclusive sense, we shall not learn how to put meaningful questions to reality and how to go about the task of finding true answers.

But precisely as only instrument for disciplining the mind in theoretical thinking which is controlled by reality literatures differ in significance. Greek literature, e.g., stands out; so does Roman; so does the Hebrew-Christian; so more recently do German and French and English.

No one can expect to cover the whole extent of the literatures. Nor need he. Literature itself has done most of the

necessary selection. Within inevitable limits, there is such a thing as becoming acquainted with the intensive system, the formative dynamic, the genius of a literature; there is such a thing as having one's own mind disciplined by it. Else were all teaching and learning, that of science included, impossible beyond the level of the immediately practical. In other words, science is teachable and is worth learning, as theoretical, because there is logic in it, hard logic; and what is true of scientific literature is also true of non-scientific; it is teachable and needs to be learned because there is no less hard logic in it; logic in each instance being the pattern of thinking that is controlled by reality.

Not simply for exceptional practical purposes, nor simply for purposes of exceptional research and scholarship, but in order to become educated, our student needs discipline of his mind by the intensive total, by the "logic," of Occidental literature. Hence the importance also of non-scientific literature, and particularly of certain literatures.

If our student can see thus far, he should have no great difficulty perhaps in seeing also that one can become really disciplined by the important literatures only when one knows the original languages; he may even come to see that in the efforts expended in learning the foreign language, worthwhile discipline

in controlled thinking is already present.

\* \* \*

I should say, therefore, that as general policy in the matter of foreign language study, the school and college

1. Should officially advise and encourage its students to study two foreign languages, at least one of them ancient.

2. Should emphasize the educational significance of Greek and Latin as ancient, and of German and French as modern foreign languages; hence, while in individual cases and for cause shown being willing to accept other foreign language in fulfilling requirements for graduation, should make clear its preference for Greek, Latin, German, and French.

## The Metrical Versions of the Psalms

By HENRY ZYLSTRA

IT is quite natural that in the congregational psalm singing tradition of the Reformed churches, the subject of the metrical versions of the Psalms should be a perennially fascinating one.

Those who are at all familiar with the strong feeling, animated debate, and continuous concern that went into the election and improvement of the *Herijmde Psalmen* of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands will not be surprised to learn that a similar drama lies behind the traditional evolution of the English metrical versions.

There have already been approximately four hundred English metrical translations of the whole Psalms. One might conclude that the possibilities had by this time been exhausted, and that yet another effort would be something of an impertinence. All the same, the efforts continue to be made. In 1940, for example, there came *The Lyric Psalter*, edited by Harry H. Mayr, and published by Liveright in New York. Hard upon it A. M. P. Dawson's *A New Metrical Version of the Psalter* appeared, coming from Sussex, England.

What happens is that a sort of dissatisfaction with all existing metrical translations tempts new versifiers to try their hand. The quest after improvement is perpetual. What the four hundred extant versions prove, therefore, is the difficulty of the task, and the merely proximate success of the efforts.

Some very distinguished poets have responded to the challenge, among them Sir Philip Sidney, George Wither, George Sandys, John Milton, Christopher Smart, Sir John Denham, and others. And yet, after sampling the efforts of each of these, and of those many others, one feels like saying with Dr. Samuel Johnson, after he had scrutinized Denham's rendering: "In this attempt he has failed: but in sacred poetry who has succeeded?"

The difficulty for the poet-translator is formidable, perhaps insurmountable. He must satisfy two demands, one of which interferes with the other. The first is the demand for fidelity — one might say for absolute fidelity — to the inspired word of the Scripture. The other is the demand for poetic genuineness or vitality. The versifier is torn between the pull of these two forces: the necessity for being "literal" and the necessity for being vital.

It is a pleasure to see that the requirement of literalcy, of very strict fidelity to the recorded Word, has in the main been a persistent concern of the poets. Usually, when a sacrifice had to be made, the poets sacrificed the poetic quality rather than the message. The Reformed churches particularly have been anxious to preserve the faithfulness of the rendering. In their insistence on the centrality of the Word in the divine service, they authorized Psalms which so far as possible re-

mained the Word. Such modifications as they introduced into the repertory of metrical translations were usually prompted by the felt need for greater accuracy and completeness in reproducing the basic text.

Such an insistence is sound. The Reformed churches have for the most part been proof against supplanting the Psalms by the hymns of the church, though they have not been averse to supplementing the Psalms by the hymns. Hence they objected to making the original text of the Psalms a jumping-off-place to poetic embroidery, New Testament adaptation, or sermonizing. They wanted their rhymed and metrical readings to say what the original said: if possible, no more, no less, and nothing different.

We ought to continue that careful concern for a true reading of the text. But we ought to try for the satisfaction of that second requirement also. The poetic genuineness, the poetic vitality, is indispensable too. If we cannot get it, we shall have, of course, to do without. If we can only approximate it, we must be content. If the sacrifice of the one or the other must be made, the poetry had better be made to concede to the message. But we ought not to conclude too quickly that a sacrifice is necessary.

For the poetry of the Psalms is indispensable to them as Psalms. They were originally composed as poems, and

## The Metrical Versions of the Psalms — Continued

they require poetry to do them justice. Good prose is, of course, always better than bad poetry. But good poetry is better than good prose. The quality of the content and the force of the communication in these Psalms are inseparably bound up with their art. In the original they were richly charged with the moving power of poetically inspired language. And they stirred the mind, lodged their message, and fixed themselves naturally in the memory because of their poetry.

In the versified Psalms, consequently, we are looking for something more than an arrangement of words in metrical order and an outfit of rhymes. The verse must be more than a metering rod to make the statements of the original a singable affair. It should, instead, constitute the Psalm an artistic organism which, so to speak, invigorates the whole consciousness of those who hear it, speak it, or sing it. It ought by its form to recommend itself so naturally to the ear, and thence to the mind of the auditor, that it will linger on and on because of its truth and beauty.

The quality of the poetry is also, therefore, a thing of great importance. No amount of emphasis on literacy of content ought to obscure this fact. One has only to think of the loveliness of such impressively memorable Psalms as the 2nd, the 8th, the 19th, the 23rd and 24th, the 42nd, the 90th, the 100th, and the like, to appreciate what a near crime it is to take the poetical prose of them in the King James or American Revised versions, and to torture it into bad verse. When one sees this done, he feels like looking into the possibility of chants and canticles again, and abandoning the metred versions altogether.

**I**T is interesting to consider that if ever we should have a rhymed and metrical version of the Psalter which was convincingly vital and effective as poetry, and which was also strictly faithful to the whole and the only meaning of the original, that version would presumably become official for our authorized Bible as well as for our church song. This is, therefore, only to suggest that in the interest of singability we shall have to be content with a good deal less than gratifying adequacy in our "poetic" versions of the Psalms. The immense difficulty is, after all, one which confronts the trans-

lator of any poetry, and most particularly that of the Hebrew, whose dominant poetic principle of parallelism simply is not the dominant principle of our Western language and literature.

The whole difficulty is well illustrated in the effort of our American Puritan ancestor, the Reverend Mr. Cotton Mather. He tried so single-mindedly for literacy that he abandoned even the formative element of rhyme to ease the burden of his conforming. In his *Psalterium Americanum*, a translation "Exactly conformed to the Original," he said: "Our poetry has attempted many versions of the Psalms, but they leave out a vast heap of those rich things which the Holy Spirit of God speaks in the original Hebrew; and . . . they put in as large an heap of poor things, which are entirely their own. And this merely for preserving the Chink of the Rhyme."

The philosophy of that would seem to be right enough. But the remark about the Chink of the Rhyme is uncharitable. For, although in the worst of the metrical versions the rhyme is sometimes a mere, and sometimes a forced, embellishment, in the best of them it enters into the meaning and helps to govern it. Moreover, in his attempt not to leave out any of "the vast heap of rich things," Cotton Mather was capable of such bad blank verse as the following for Psalm 42:

*As the hart makes a panting cry  
For cooling streams of waters;  
So my soul makes a panting cry  
To Thee, O mighty God!*

In Mather, then, as in scores of others, there is that fine concern for doing total justice to the fundamental text of Holy Writ. But there is, too, so little regard for the poetic mode of statement that the force of the original suffers after all.

The worst of the offenders on the score of content were those who deliberately read personal or official or "evangelical" points of view into the text of the Psalms. Thus Charles Wesley practically made hymns out of them. Consider, for instance, a couple of stanzas from his 23rd:

*Jesus the good Shepherd is;  
Jesus died His sheep to save;  
He is mine, and I am His;  
All I want in Him I have. . . .  
Bear me to the sacred scene,*

*The silent streams and pastures green  
Where the crystal waters shine,  
Springing up with life divine.*

But there have been worse offenders on the side of content than Charles Wesley. Here, according to H. A. Glass, *The Story of the Psalters* (London, 1888), are some of the grossest distortionists of the recorded Word:

*James Maxwell, 1773, substituted the sacrifice of Christ for all allusions to "brutal sacrifices."*

*Elhanan Winchester, 1797, adapted his Psalter to the doctrine held by Universalists.*

*Joseph Irons, a Calvinist, 1847, "trusted that Socinians, Arians, and Arminians would find no music in his version for their falsehoods."*

It must, however, be said, concerning this matter of literacy of content, that there is perhaps no considerable body of rhymed and metrical versions of the Psalms which has not had to make some concessions to the form. One way of making up for such acknowledged defect is to compile Psalters with more than one version of some of the Psalms, so that what is amiss in the one may be amended in the other. Such slighter departures from "the original" usually take the form of addition, or "padding," or "filler" words and phrases, not present in the source, but demanded by the meter, the rhyme, the line length, or the stanzaic grouping. Sometimes they take the form also, not of actual omission, then of underdevelopment of some sentiments, and overdevelopment or repetition of others. At times, too, there is a reshifting of emphasis, owing to the fact that the rhyme-word, although it carries the accent, is not the word which the natural logic of the statement stresses.

**O**N the formal side, as distinguished from that of the content, the continuing fault of the less successful translations is artificiality. This is to say that the verse may "scan" with most monotonous regularity, and may carry its rhymes well, but in the process of remaking loses its spiritual elan. Very frequent, too, are the awkward versions or transpositions of the logically desirable word order. The natural order, for instance, at the beginning of the 23rd, is "I shall not want." In the Bay Psalm Book version, 1640, this comes, "Want therefore shall not be." The reason for this transposition and the type persists — is of course

the effort to get the rhyme word for the concluding line of the stanza, which, in this example, becomes a similarly tortured "Doth cause me down to lie."

Such artificialities would seem to be too high a price to pay. They mar what ought to be a spiritually stirring poem, in order to make it "available" for singing to a tune. And there are numerous like infelicities. Thus the "poetic license" of the *contraction* (*o'er*, *'tis, where'er, I'll*), so easily called in by the older poetasters, is greatly overdone in many Psalm readings. It gives them an archaic and artificial cast.

What is worse is that many of the versifiers have been content to do justice to the denotation of the original, that is, to its basic logical thrust, and have not explored the possibilities of connotation and suggestiveness. The play of consonance and assonance, the management of sound, generally, and all the myriad subtleties that are at work in poetry as in music — these are neglected. In fact, one is gratified when such "suggestiveness" is present at all. It is present, for example, in this nice success of the Tate and Brady (1696) 42nd:

*As pants the hart for cooling streams,  
When heated in the chase,  
So yearns my soul, O God, for Thee,  
And Thy refreshing grace.*

The denotation or direct logical meaning of that is the same as in Mather's clumsy effort quoted above, but consider how richly enhanced the total impact because of the better poetry. The suggestiveness is present also in William Kethe's well established "Old Hundredth":

*All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth-  
tell,  
Come ye before Him and rejoice.*

It may be interesting, after all this theory, to watch the versifiers at work for a moment. We can note some of them handling the 23rd Psalm. The King James text has:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

Robert Crowley, in 1549, preceding the 1611 Bible therefore, made this of it:

*The Lord is my Shephearde, and I  
shall never stand in nede;  
For in pasture exceedinge good He  
leadeth me to fede,  
He causeth me to laye me downe in  
pasture full of grasse;  
And dryveth me to caulme waters that  
be so clear as glasse.*

That has a pleasant rhythm, suitable to the mood of the pastoral. But its diction is now forbiddingly archaic, and the last line tapers off in a too-scientific figure.

Now follows the work of Sternhold and Hopkins, whose collection of 1564 constituted the old standby of the English Psalter until partly supplanted in 1696. This one has a commendable directness. It is, one could say, right but not rich. And it has that unconvincing fourth line:

*My shepherd is the living Lord,  
Nothing I therefore neede;  
In pastors fair with waters calm  
He set me for to fede.*

Sir Philip Sidney's handling in 1580 is interesting, though it were hard to find the music to suit it. The last two lines, however, have the very quality of the pastoral:

*The Lord, the Lord my Shephearde is,  
And so can never I  
Tast missery.  
He rests me in greene pasture his;  
By waters still and sweete  
He guides my feete.*

Next follows the Francis Rous version, 1643 and following. His work dominated the traditionally established Scottish Psalter. His product is straightforward but meager:

*My shepheard is the living Lord,  
And He that doth me feed;  
How can I then lack anything  
Whereof I stand in need?*

Such a reading lacks the imagery of the basic text. Perhaps Rous recognized that he had stripped the tree of its foliage. He tried again, and he got the suggestiveness of the figures, but then the transpositions came in:

*The Lord to me a shepheard is,  
Want therefore shall not I;  
He in the folds of tender grasse  
Doth cause me down to lie.*

In 1668, Miles Smyth, a type of an "elegant" age, set out to dress up his version. His ornate introduction hints at the product: "The author of this version of the Psalms of King David, considering the Excellency, not only of the Divine matter they contain, but of the Sacred Rapture wherein they were penned, and the sublime Poetry where-with they were set out, and adorned by the Royal and Inspired Prophet, could not but blush to think, how that Metre in which our Parochial Churches usually sing them, hath disguised so eminent a part of the Holy Writ, which bears a more than ordinary stamp of that ever-blessed Spirit by which it was dictated and given. This gave the Author occasion to make Essay, whether (without taking the advantages of an unconfin'd Fancy) it might not be easie enough . . . to make them speak their own genuine sense, in proper and smooth English." Well, he made his "Essay" but what it proves is that it was not "easie":

*God, by whose Providence we live,  
Whose care secures our rest,  
My shepherd is, no ill can touch  
Nor want my Soul infest.*

*He makes luxuriant flow'ry Meads  
Serve me for Food and Ease;  
And leads me where the cooling  
Streams,  
My thirsty heat appease.*

So the versions go, down the historical line. The latest which comes to hand is that of Harry H. Mayer (Copyright, Liveright), referred to above. It is forthright, true, done in modern idiom, without inversion, and simple. Its defect? Yes, it is there: that last word, *hide*, is not quite what the sense requires, and is slightly forced:

*My Shepherd is the Lord,  
What can I want beside?  
He leads me where green pastures are  
And where cool waters hide.*

**T**HUS the perpetual quest goes on. What one could greatly wish for is poetry so stirring, so appropriate, so redolent of its own testimony to the truth, that one could not resist memorizing it. We must work to that end. And when we are satisfied that we have

the best versions available, we should publish them independently, without musical notation, and proceed to commit them to memory. We used to do it in the old Dutch catechism classes. We could do it in the English catechism

classes, we could do it in the Sunday schools, and we could do it in the Bible courses of the Christian Schools. There is so wide a range of the truth of Revelation in the Psalms that the minister hardly has to reach out for hymns to

accompany his sermons, even those on the Heidelberg Catechism. The sung doctrine of good poems, set to good music, and thus becoming good song, would be a great force for solid good in the church.

# A CALL FOR WRITERS

By NEAL RENSENBRINK

*One of the good pieces of news that came to our attention recently was the arrival from the Western Christian High School at Hull, Iowa, of the annual LITERARY ECHO of that school. This fifty-five page mimeographed document contained some thirty pieces by almost as many individual young writers. The range and quality were remarkably good. This kind of effort in our high schools, particularly if it can be sustained at our college, suggests a more expressive future for our Reformed community. Hard upon it there followed Mr. Rensenbrink's "Call for Writers" reproduced below. Mr. Rensenbrink is interested in developing a "community" of Reformed young writers, a community whose members find some way of remaining in touch with each other, and of taking heart from each other's efforts in literary expression. He would be eager to hear from those who would like to participate in this venture. He can be reached by way of the Journal address. —Edd.*

**I**t is easy to say that if a writer is good enough, he will write without encouragement, without organization, and without a special medium.

There is some truth in that. But I should like to add that few, if any, of those whom I know to be capable of turning out reasonably good stuff are doing any writing; and I would further add that merely sitting on one's hands waiting for one or two people to break into *Poetry* magazine is not completely satisfactory.

All of us need stimulation and prodding. But beyond that, and because of the growing specialization and impersonalization of the times, we need a sense of community and rapport with other writers of like mind and spirit. The fragmentation, or if you will, the atomization of knowledge and experience has progressed to such a point nowadays that it is difficult for the individual artist, however vicarious his

imagination or plastic his sensitivity, to rediscover among the splinters and the shadows some measure of insight into the underlying unity of human experience. That beauty might also be truth is denied in contemporary thought since it cannot be established by currently prevailing theories of knowledge. The idea of the aesthetic dimension as having knowledgeable form and content lies shattered in a thousand pieces under the impact of a wretched activism and scientism whose highest praise for a piece of literature is its social or political utility or its ability to stir a certain noble sentiment.

Therefore, I believe the Christian artist has need of a community where he can find strength, encouragement, and the impetus to reach out and articulate for himself the aesthetically creative dimension. The community should not be something that is established primarily in the organizational sense of rules, principles and an official membership list. It should rather develop as a fluid, spontaneous enterprise where the dynamic of participation and discipline derive from the individual artist himself.

I might try to indicate what the Christian writer should write or how he should write, and for whom. But this is unnecessary since it is largely something which the individual artist himself must determine. However, it could be offered by way of suggestion, that he think in the third place of his audience, in the second place of the money he might gain by his writing, and in the first place of his own responsibility as an artist to create a realistic, honest and self-mediated work of art.

It is this last which in the end determines whether he communicates or not; or whether what he has to say is worth communicating. If he is not satisfied with this and wishes to have some visualization of an audience, he might aim at the more reflective and sensitive non-professional layman of his acquaintance, someone whom he suspects

might on occasion go for a long walk through the streets of the city "just for no reason at all." It makes no difference who or what he is, whether garbage hauler or factory foreman or bank president. And it is good to remember with MacLeish — though perhaps he said it over-simply — "that a poem should not mean but be." If a poem or play or story achieves that quality it will be both read and appreciated and in differentiated degrees also understood.

And finally, at the risk of appearing to pontificate, I would suggest that we all take thought and courage from what Hopkins said, "That the world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out like shining from shook foil." That is, it is not enough to be merely bitter or merely ecstatic or to take a place somewhere in between and call it the stoical or existential attitude; this is too easy, and too easily becomes a pose. It seems to me the bitterness and ecstasy are indissolubly commingled, the golden and the leaden echo are heard together, though frequently the one is more loudly heard than the other. Perhaps it is at least part of the job of the artist to mediate human experience in all its various shades and refocus it towards "that grace of sense, that white light still and moving, which makes a world explicit and understood in the completion of its partial ecstasy, the resolution of its partial horror." That is Eliot and it is somewhat metaphysical. But what I want to say is that the artist should do more than live out his exile. He must get beyond merely weathering the storm; he must strive in himself and through his art to recover something of the meaning and the glory of life, or as Auden puts it "(though) bleaguered by negation and despair, show an affirming flame." If the artist cannot find any meaning or glory, or cannot know it, or if he knows it but cannot communicate it then we are really in the dark and God is dead. Because I know this is not

true, I am writing and asking you to share with me and the rest the artistic ferment of your heart and mind, that we together may build up a community which can help restore to ourselves and others a knowledge of man's aesthetic dimension.

This is now the plan: to assemble a volume of prose and poetry which can be published as soon as there is enough material to fill it. In this way we are not bound to periodic and regular publication with all the many risks involved in such a venture.

Then too, a very important condition for developing a community of writers is for us to publish for our own use a kind of *Newsletter* which will represent the measure of our own self-consciousness, and in which we can include anything we have or wish to say about ourselves as writers and would-be writers: our hopes, our dreams, our ideas, points of view, and criticism. It can also include news about who has written what, who is writing and who is not, and notices about books and articles relevant to the artist.

Another equally important activity which all of us can and must carry on is to find, ferret out, and interest other writers of whatever stage of development in our common interest. Your willingness and eagerness to share this thing with others will, perhaps more than any other test, measure the extent of your enthusiasm for this venture. In this way we can increase our numbers, broaden in scope, and most likely improve in quality. I hope that your response will be to jump into this thing with both feet flying.

## LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

### Mission Methodology

Dear Rev. Boer:

After reading your "Does It Work?" in the April issue, I am confused. Paul's theology is a *sine qua non* for the Church. Do you now say that his mission methodology is also a *sine qua non*?

It strikes me that you are discussing mission methodology in a dogmatic fashion, so much that the very thing Roland Allen emphasizes, namely, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you fail to give due recognition. Personally, I am confident you do not feel this way, but your article seemingly ignores the silence of Scripture. The comparative silence on Peter's methodology or that of the other apostles — and by God's standards they, too, were eminently successful — is challenging. How, for example, was the sending church in Antioch brought about? Did God intend the work of only one, Paul, to give us the "norm" to govern all mission activity everywhere and at all times by the Church?

Roland Allen seemingly permits of more flexibility than you do. In his *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours*, Ch. XI, he says,

He (that is, Paul — CK) refused to allow the universal application of precedents. When a question had arisen and a judgment had been given he did not apply the judgment as of universal authority. The decrees of the Jerusalem Council were addressed to the Churches of Syria and Cilicia. St. Paul carried them as far as Galatia, but he carried them no farther. He did not enforce them in Macedonia or Achaia. Precedents are not of universal application. The conditions in Corinth or in Thessa-

lonica were not the same as in Antioch, in Syria, or even in Galatia. What was vital and natural in Syria would have been artificial in Achaia. . . . Questions are not settled once for all. They recur in each age and in each country in different forms. They have to be restated and the answer must be revised and restated by the Church there on the spot.

You will grant, will you not, that the Pauline Church government was part of his methodology? The one illustration quoted is sufficient to show that Paul's approach allowed for elasticity. To that we subscribe.

I hope I am wrong on this, but it also strikes me that you intimate that by opposing the minority position on education, for example, we thereby must subscribe in principle to such far-fetched practices as a "socio-economic planning commission." Such sweeping assertions are submitted dogmatically as premises from which the reader is to proceed to evaluate present missionary methods. Should not the premises first be proven as facts?

Theory and historical fact are so absolutely interwoven in your article that one hardly knows where one leaves off and the other begins. We would not take issue with historical data. You did wise in not quoting Nevius on China, seeing that his statistics have been challenged by Charles Allen Clark.

Latourette in *The International Review of Missions*, Apr., 1953, also drew attention to the Karen-Batak-Korea work. It rather surprises us that out of centuries of mission effort, both of you seized upon only these instances of the Native Church. Was all of the Lord's "Army" out of step except Paul and these few?

Whereas you stress for a homogene-

ity in approach, Latourette, who is a distinguished professor of Mission and Oriental History, at Yale, pleads for heterogeneity in mission methodology. Says he, ". . . we do well to be cautious in seeking to draw lessons from any one period of the spread of the Faith and to apply them dogmatically to the current situation. Many factors enter into the spread of the Gospel and the emergence of churches . . . The Spirit can use many different and even contradictory methods."

Frankly, we are a bit disappointed with your "Does It Work?" We were looking for an illustration among a culture such as our American Indians. Your article loses its potency when illustrations must be sought so few and far between, among primitive peoples so unlike the American Indians who live checkerboarded among a dominant "white" citizenship.

We, too, subscribe to native responsibility effectively applied. But the pattern should not exceed the cloth.

C. Kuipers  
Zuni, New Mexico

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### Creation and Evolution

Dear Rev. Stob:

The undersigned as the secretary of the Committee on "Creation and Evolution" asks for a little space in your esteemed *Reformed Journal* to reply to your criticism of our report which occurred in the issue of June, 1953.

As far as the three directives are concerned we are not ready to admit that the Ecumenical Synod should not have made any declaration at all. Your criticism on that score made us think of the Indian prince who received an invitation to attend the horse-races in England. He replied that he did not see why he should go through all that

## Letters to the Journal —

trouble since he had known for some time already that one horse can run faster than another. Our Committee, although aware of that view on the part of some, did not take it seriously. We thought it was our duty to evaluate the three points as far as they go. We have the highest regard for the men who participate in the Ecumenical Synods. Nearly all the great Ecumenical Synods of the past decided on doctrines that were not suddenly thought of but had been in the making in the minds of the people sometimes for centuries and, to their way of thinking, clearly stated in the Bible. Thus much of what is found in the Canons of Dordt was believed by the Remonstrants as well as the Counter Remonstrants. Some of it was stated for symmetry and for the proper setting of the argument. And I am not so sure that the problem of Creation and Evolution is not a controversial subject among us at the present time. We are not averse to the theologians setting out beacon-lights to guide us.

But you were correct in surmising that the Committee did not want them to hang around our necks like millstones. The Ecumenical Synod did not want that either, evidently. It referred to the three points as "algemene richtlijnen," general directives. However, our Committee wanted to be absolutely sure that we were correct in that view and hence we advised Synod to adopt the three points with the understanding that they should not be put on a par with the Articles of the Belgic Confession, for example.

It surprised us that you construed our statement to say "that there are some clear and basic Scriptural principles not to be put on par with our Forms of Unity." That peculiar interpretation made us think of one of those optical illusions which we have in one of our books where you see a rider on horseback. The question below it reads, "Is the rider coming or going?" I would say that he is coming, but Rev. Stob might say that he is going. On the following page it tells us that the rider is coming. I am sure that if Rev. Stob had used the right perspective he would never have come to that conclusion. The three points are human formulations of Biblical truth which are only approximations. This is particularly true of the third point; even the

## Continued

punctuation is here defective according to one critic.

This third point as well as the first point speaks about the "historical character" of Genesis 1 and 2. Rev. Stob also criticizes the statement of the Committee that this needs elucidation. Had our critic known the background of this statement, we are sure he would have been more in agreement with our advice. Our Committee put its ear to the ground to see what criticism was offered on the three points, not only in our country but also elsewhere. Criticisms had been lodged against that term. Among others, Dr. J. Verseveldt says in "Geloof en Wetenschap," p. 147, in his criticism of the three points: "He who begins by stating in advance that the historical character of the revelation in Genesis 1 and 2 must be maintained without compromise has no need to talk anymore with biologists, geologists, etc. Because what we are exactly concerned about is the historicity of the story of creation." This does not mean that the Committee endorses this view, but it gives strong support to our contention that the Ecumenical Synod must someday explain what it means by the "historical character." We do not say that we do not believe in it. We are merely asking for the elucidation. What does the man in the street know about it?

A lot of moss, cobweb and fantasy encumbers the historicity of Genesis. Thus Dr. H. Bavinck in his *Gereförmeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. II, p. 520 relates the interesting tug-of-war that went on for centuries about the problem whether creation took place in the spring or in the fall; some even quarreled about whether it took place on March 25 or October 26. About a dozen eminent theologians are mentioned on each side. But it seems that the prize should be handed to Dr. J. B. Lightfoot who placed creation-week between October 18 and 24, 4004 B.C., and the creation of Adam, on October 23 at approximately 9 a.m., 45th meridian time. More accurately than that the sagacious Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge did not want to commit himself.

Or, take the instance when scholars began to find the bones of prehistoric creatures. Some believed that they were the gigantic limbs of patriarchs, who were believed to have been tall because they became old. Following out this idea, Henrion in 1718 published a

work in which he assigned to Adam a height of 123 feet 9 inches, Noah 20 feet shorter, and so on! (Cf. Lacy's *Biology and Its Makers*, p. 324).

There are so many different interpretations of Genesis, and others that are coming, that we considered it far from superfluous to advise that, even though we believe in the historical character of Genesis, the Ecumenical Synod had better clean the lamp of this beacon.

The main contention of the Committee was that the three points are good as far as they go and advised our Synod to accept them.

Peter G. Berkout,  
Secr. Synodical Committee on  
"Creation and Evolution."

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## Junior Colleges

Dear Dr. Zylstra:

I have just caught up on some "back reading" and your articles on the Junior College issue have been very provocative. In your discussion "High School and College" you strike the keynote when you ask for an "equivalent . . . of the better American private academies" and that this level could be approached by adding the freshman year of college to the high school period.

It would do many things, although it might not conceivably be the panacea for all our ills viewed academically and administratively. These ends could be attainable:

1. Makes possible attendance at our present high school institutions to the age of 18 or 19.

2. Greater appreciation by our people, than now, that we have something "more" to offer, curriculum wise, to those attending high school,

3. It should provide stimulus to our teaching profession to enlarge their scope and vision of their work. Too often we hear the high school teacher say, "If only I could have had Billy for another year after his senior year when he really started to grasp things . . ."

4. Lastly, but very importantly, it would give impetus to Calvin to "intensify" its whole program at college university level, to make it "indispensible excellent" and it would not have "to drum up business."

Perhaps we should explore and re-evaluate the 6-4-4 program suggested by our good friend, Walter A. De Jong.

few years ago in the *Christian Home and School Magazine*.

If we only could put these ideas into practice it would enable us to increase our standards all along the line without incurring great capital outlays in the formation of Junior Colleges.

John Last  
Paterson, N. J.

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### The Latin Catechism Original?

DEAR SIRS:

Your *Journal* is very much appreciated; it contains much food for thought. In the article, "The 'Absolute' Antinomianism," by the Rev. Leonard Verduin, which appeared in the June issue, there was, however, an error which ought not to remain unchallenged. On page 11 the Rev. Verduin, in referring to Question 5 of the Heidelberg Catechism, states, "The original Latin has *propensus sum*." I should like to take the liberty to point out, however, that the original text of the Heidelberg Catechism was not written in Latin, but in German. This is obvious from a perusal of *The Heidelberg Catechism in German, Latin and English*, Prepared and Published by the Direction of the German Reformed Church in the United States of America, Tercentenary Edition (New York: Scribner's, 1863) — a work, incidentally, which ought to be in our Calvin Library, if it is not already there. This work quotes in its first column the *ipsissima verba* of the third edition (1563) of the original text of the Heidelberg Catechism. There is added, in parallel columns, the Latin translation, a translation into modern German, and one into modern English.

The preface to this work informs us that the Latin translation was made by Joshua Lagus and Lambertus Pithopodus, and was published the same year (1563) with the approval of the Elector. I quote from the Preface the following: "The Latin translation, as regards classic style and fidelity to the original, possesses only ordinary merit. Here and there, words and phrases are added. In some instances, the language is a paraphrase instead of a translation; in others it fails to give the true sense of the original German. It cannot, accordingly, be assigned a place beside the original text" (*op. cit.*, p. 5).

The Preface goes on to say that, in all probability, the English version of the Heidelberg Catechism now in com-

mon use in the Dutch Reformed churches is a translation from the Dutch version, and that the Dutch version is a translation from the Latin, modified by comparison with the original German, and by certain additions and omissions, which, in the absence of any historical authority, may be justly attributed to the Dutch translator (*op. cit.*, p. 6). As far as I can determine, this is the English version which we have in our Psalter-Hymnal. It would appear, therefore, that the version of the catechism which is in use in our churches is not entirely true to the original but in some respects a paraphrase of or modification of the original.

For example, the answer to Question 18 in our English translation reads as follows: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." The original German has here, however, "Unser Herr Jesus Christus der uns zur vollkommenen Erlösung und Gerechtigkeit geschenkt ist." The Latin translation has here introduced the variation which appears in our English version.

Sometimes the translation is not too happy. For instance, in Answer 10, "is terribly displeased" is not as strong as "zürnet schrecklich" in the original German. In Answer 49, moreover, the English translation, which uses the words "pledge" and "earnest," completely misses the beauty of the German words, "pfand" and "gegenpfandt" (which could, perhaps, be rendered "pledge and counterpledge"). The entire point of the answer is missed when this reciprocal relation between Christ in heaven and the Spirit on earth is not made clear.

Sometimes, too, it happens that the English translation does not sufficiently do justice to certain distinctions which occur in the German. For example, Question 74 asks, "Are infants also to be baptized?" In our English version the answer reads, in part, "Yes; for since they, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and Church of God . . . they must also by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be ingrafted into the Christian Church . . ." As it reads, this answer is confusing, giving the impression both that the infants of believers are by virtue of their covenantal parentage already included in the church and that they must still be ingrafted into the Church. If they are, however, already included in the church, it would seem unnecessary to

graft them into the church; and if they must still be grafted in, it would seem to be unwarranted to say that they are already included in the church before baptism. A look at the original German, however, clears up the difficulty. The first time the word church is used in the English the German has *gemein*, the equivalent of the Dutch word *gemeente*; whereas the second time the English has Church the German has *Kirche*. In other words, what the authors here intended to say was that already before baptism the child of believing parents belongs to the "commonalty" of God's covenant people, whereas it is the act of baptism which ingrafts the covenant child officially into the church as an ecclesiastical institution. This distinction, however, between *gemein* and *Kirche* does not at all appear in our English translation, and hence confusion arises. (In that same connection, do we correctly translate the Dutch word *gemeente* in the form for infant baptism when we ask parents to agree that their children "as members of His *Church* ought to be baptized"?)

It would seem, therefore, in view of the important use to which the Heidelberg Catechism is put in our circles, both in preaching and in teaching, that we should have an accurate, annotated version of that venerable document, together with a new English translation, made directly from the original German

(Rev.) Anthony A. Hoekema  
Paterson, New Jersey

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### Malan's Apartheid

DEAR SIRS:

If one of the contributors to the *Journal* were interested in this matter, I should appreciate reading his reaction to the enclosed clipping from *The Cresset*, April, 1953, pp. 10-11. *The Cresset* is a monthly "review of literature, the arts and current affairs," published by the Valparaiso University Press, Minneapolis, Minn.

"But something more important than politics is involved here. (*i.e.*, in the policy of apartheid —edd.) Dr. Malan is a clergyman of the South African Dutch Reformed Church. His policies have, therefore, not merely the implied sanction of a European political system; they have also the implied sanction of the Christian faith. To have the work of African evangelization handicapped in such a way is very close to intoler-

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Continued

able. Because the progress of the Gospel is in very real danger of being fatally handicapped in Africa by the identification of Christianity with racial persecution, it would seem advisable that responsible Christian leaders in Europe and the United States publicly repudiate Malan and his policies and urge their fellow-Christians in South Africa

to give political effect to this repudiation."

Paul Miller,  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

*Donald Grey Barnhouse, Editor of Eternity magazine, voices somewhat the same sentiments in his July 1953 issue. He states: "I am more ashamed of the situation in the Cape than in any other part of Africa, because it is the fruit of an intolerable twisting of Christianity by supposedly fundamental*

Christian groups. The fact that Malan, the Prime Minister, is what I would call a reprobate Reformed Church Minister, makes the situation all the more nauseating. I wish that editors of the Reformed and Christian Reformed papers would courageously handle this matter and show the Afrikaners that their American cousins do not support them in any wise in their repressive measures against the lowest common denominator of human rights.'

Edd

## Berkouwer on the RSV Controversy

In the March 21 issue of *Trouw* Professor G. C. Berkouwer of Amsterdam commented on the fierce debate going on in this country about the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Berkouwer calls attention to the fact that some are loosely charging Communist-sympathy or crypto-Communism against particular members of the translating group. He is glad to notice of course that, over against such extravagant attack, "there are also those — in orthodox circles — who maintain that we must evaluate the new translation *on its own merits* and that the big question is whether or not it can actually be demonstrated that there has been some tinkering with the basic text."

Professor Berkouwer refers to the much-mooted passage in Is. 7:14, and comments: "One of the words feverishly being discussed is that of Isaiah 7:14, which the new translation reproduces as *young woman* (instead of *virgin*). This represents a change from the old translations. The change can be compared, in a way, with that between the *statenvertaling* (older, official, Dutch version — edd.) and the new Dutch translation which has *jonkvrouw* instead of *maagd*. The changes are occasioned by the word used by Isaiah, and the new American translation has indeed the word *virgin* in Matthew 1, for the simple reason that the original employed there very characteristically means *virgin*."

It is clear that Professor Berkouwer does not approve of the *argument at hominem* being employed in the discussion of the RSV. "What is evident" he writes, "is that in the appraising of the new translation the critics are looking at the persons who worked on it rather than at the work they did."

Berkouwer takes exception in particular to Carl McIntire's criticism of the

RSV in his widely distributed brochure, "Why Christians Should Not Accept It." "It is very evident that he looks at the new translation via. the translators . . . He complains, too, about a new rendering of Micah 5:2, and uses an argument which, it is clear, could be directed just as well against all sorts of orthodox authors in The Netherlands, men who would not for a moment think of denying the divinity and pre-existence of Christ. Besides, he takes exceptions to putting in parentheses the doxology of the Lord's Prayer. Still, this doxology is placed within parentheses in the new Dutch translation of Matthew 6 also, not because the translators *do not want* to appropriate these words, but because in any case they want to *acknowledge* the fact that the passage is missing in the most important manuscripts. Hence in the new Dutch translation as well as in the *Korte Verklaring* of Herman Ridderbos the passage is made parenthetical.

"It is clear," Berkouwer continues, "that in using this kind of method one gets on the wrong track . . . Such an attack from the nature of the case evokes the reaction of others, who are prompted to ask whether in translating the Bible the primary issue is not that of taking very seriously what *the text says*. Hence we are grateful that in the *Calvin Forum*, for example, the warning is sounded (by Henry Schultze) against a superficial discussion and handling of the matter, and in which it is pointed out that the effort should not be to find exactly what we should like to find, but what is actually recorded . . . Precisely because this new translation comes from a definite source, and therefore raises all sorts of problems, it is *the more necessary* that in judging it the atmosphere

be purged; and it is no contribution to this end that so many critics place the discussion on a *political* plane. . . . *Precisely if it should be true* that some of the translators are not averse to criticism of the Scripture, is it binding for the critics of the RSV to proceed in a *totally responsible* way? The critic who proceeds in that way will not lend himself to the charge of being "traditionalist." He is simply fulfilling his calling, a calling which comes up out of respect for the Word of God. But the critic who does not proceed thus responsibly, and ignores questions which the orthodox also see and acknowledge, will not advance the causes he wants to advance . . ."

Berkouwer concludes. "A new translation of the Bible is not a thing to be had for the wishing it. All the more then, the criticism of it must be *pure* criticism, so that it may be evident that it is precisely *orthodoxy* which is absolutely governed by the desire for the *unalloyed* Word of God. The orthodoxy consequently does not fear scholarship but regards it precisely as the means by which to pass on to the people of our time the *pure* Word of God . . . The earnestness with which various writers undertake to fulfill this task makes one breathe more freely in the face of that other method which tries to solve the problems simplifying."

Synod of 1953 has given the appraisal of the RSV into the hands of a Committee. The members of the Committee, presumably, and the members of the church they serve, will want to make this kind of report which embodies the responsible criticism Berkouwer envisages. Otherwise orthodoxy is discredited.

— Translated by the Editors